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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which is addressed to school administrators, examines the principles of service learning as a way of teaching rather than just another program and explains how administrators can customize service learning to the unique characteristics of their own schools and communities. The booklet begins by defining service learning as a delivery system that can be used as a central organizing principle for helping students achieve personal and social growth and prepare for the world of work and citizenship while achieving the school's curricular goals. Discussed in a section devoted to administrative issues are the following topics: the special problems of scheduling service learning in secondary schools; options for reducing transportation costs associated with service learning; funding opportunities; and liability concerns and risk management strategies. The following educational issues are considered: professional development; ways of integrating service learning into the curriculum; student assessment in classroom and nonclassroom settings; and program evaluation. Examined in a section on support issues are the following topics: building an infrastructure, public relations, and community support and involvement. Concluding the guide are brief descriptions of the services provided by three national organizations: the National Service-Learning Cooperative/Clearinghouse, Corporation for National Service, and National Dropout Prevention Center. (MN)

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LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Administrator's Guide To Service Learning

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Administrator's Guide To Service Learning

by Jan Wright

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Linking Learning With Life

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Table Of Contents

A Letter to Administrators 1

Why Service Learning 3

Administrative Issues
- Scheduling 6
- Transportation 6
- Funding 8
- Liability 9

Educational Issues
- Professional Development 12
- Curricular Integrity 12
- Student Assessment 13
- Program Evaluation 13

Support Issues
- School Structures 15
- Public Relations 16
- Community Support and Involvement 17

Conclusion 18

Next Steps
- Resource Organizations 19

A Letter To Administrators:

My experience as a school principal suggests that teachers do not want another program and school administrators do not want to have to figure out how to implement something new.

What teachers and administrators do want is to teach all children successfully, to help students maximize their potential, to develop young people who will become contributing citizens, and to make a real difference in the lives of their students.

What this guide provides is assistance in reaching your goals as educators without having to "add on" another program. I would like to share ways for integrating service learning into your school, and provide some tips to help you do so successfully.

Service learning is not just another program; it is a way of teaching. Service learning does not replace any of the standard curriculum in your school but enhances the curriculum to make it more meaningful and relevant for your students. Service learning was not written by the experts and does not come neatly packaged in a cute little box. It uses the expertise of your staff, the enthusiasm of your students, and the resources of your community. While there are guidelines to help ensure success, there is not one right or wrong way. Service learning is actually customized by the students and teachers themselves as they work in their own unique schools and communities.

Service learning is an experiential teaching and learning method that provides students with an opportunity to apply academic skills learned in the classroom to real-life situations. These real-life situations are problems that need solutions, and the students' service activities are directed towards providing these solutions.

Many schools already participate in service activities. A typical all-school project is collecting canned goods for the needy at holiday time. This is community service, and it gives students an opportunity to help others. While this is admirable, it is not service learning; nor

does it maximize the learning benefits that could be occurring. However, if during the canned goods drive, students study nutrition and research the most nutritional items to be collected; if they study the economics of our society and discover some of the causes of poverty; if they graph the daily amounts of cans that are donated; if they read such books as *The Grapes of Wrath* and write an essay about how the Joad family's story compares to what a local family is encountering; if they research, develop, and print a recipe book to accompany each box of goods that will go to the families – then community service is transformed into service learning. Relating the service activity to the academic curriculum makes the learning that takes place have true meaning for the student.

Service learning becomes more exciting and meaningful when students have direct contact with service recipients. Imagine the learning that could take place when young people learn about the aging process, understand the changes in the brain when Alzheimer's disease occurs, study the different occupations in the health field, and acquire the skills to teach an exercise class for senior citizens. Then, when they go out and actually use the information and skills learned in the classroom at a senior citizens' center or nursing home with real people who have real needs, there could not be a more powerful learning experience.

Service learning stretches the traditional paper-and-pencil curriculum. Students have an opportunity to move outside the four walls of the classroom and see their learning at work. They have the chance to become true resources within their community. They have a reason to learn. They become someone important doing something important – today.

Service learning is learning for life. Service-learning experiences expose youth to a variety of vocations. It allows them to see adults at work. It provides opportunities to develop such work skills as working cooperatively, being prompt, being reliable, sharing ideas, making decisions, and being responsible. It also prepares them for their roles as citizens, fostering a "can do" attitude as they go about solving local community problems.

Service learning can be integrated into every subject area from English to science, from music to computer technology. It is highly successful with both the learning disabled student and the gifted and talented student alike. It is appropriate at all grade levels. In short, it is for all students. Because it is a hands-on, high involvement, self-esteem enhancing method, it is especially good for students from at-risk situations.

Now with all this going for it, the last thing we want to have happen is for an already overburdened school administrator to close the door on service learning because there are some nuts-and-bolts issues that need to be dealt with. I have compiled the suggestions in this guide to provide you with some ideas on how to meet some of the issues involved when implementing service learning—administrative, educational, and support.

Service learning can literally transform your school, your teachers, and, of course, your students—the reason why we are in education in the first place. It truly "links learning with life." I encourage you to give it a try!

Jan Wright
National Dropout Prevention Center

Why Service Learning?

As an administrator, you are familiar with your school's and school district's mission. As you, your staff, your parents, and your community work to achieve this mission, notice how service learning provides a unique means to meet your goals.

It is our belief that service learning can be an extremely successful delivery system for meeting the overall goals of our public schools. Our experience with schools that have used service learning as the central organizing principle for their educational plan shows us the unifying, yet transforming, power of service learning. It has a singular ability to meet students' needs for personal and social growth, preparation for the world of work and citizenship while at the same time achieving the school's curricular goals.

Administrative Issues

Scheduling

Scheduling seems to be more of a problem at the secondary level where participating in service projects tends to require more time than a traditional 50-minute period allows. Some ideas to consider are:

- Look into the many types of alternative scheduling which allow for longer individual class times, such A/B day schedules.
- Use block scheduling, such as a humanities block that is team taught by a language arts and a social studies teacher, thereby providing a double class period.
- Set aside a half day regularly designated for service activities.
- Schedule service-learning classes, such as a Civic Responsibility class, during the first period, last period, or prior to the students' study hall or lunch period so time can be expanded when necessary.
- Pursue service activities that take place on-site so transportation time does not come into play.
- Schedule service activities outside of the school day and on weekends.

Transportation

Transportation becomes a large hurdle in many school districts because of the costs involved. Here are some possible options:

- Seek to use a school bus or van. Service learning is a curricular activity and will be as beneficial, if not more so, to the students than many other field trips.
- Approach a church or car dealership about providing a van for transporting students.

- Investigate the possibility of using parent drivers. Be sure you and they are aware of the extent of insurance coverage. Also, be sure to inform other parents that there will be a parent driving.
- In some school districts, teachers are covered by the district's liability insurance and are therefore allowed to drive if they have the appropriate license.
- Driver education students can make deliveries during driving class time when the school is involved with a program such as Meals on Wheels.
- When high school students are driving themselves, be sure that it is done with full knowledge and permission of the parents.
- Walk to the service site.
- The site might be located on a regular school bus route for after-school participation.

After reviewing these suggestions, if you still feel that taking students off-site, either in a group or individually, is just not possible, do not give up service learning. Consider these alternatives:

- Students can plan and participate in activities at the school, such as peer and cross-age tutoring, campus beautification, recycling, and building campus nature trails.
- Students can develop projects that take place only in the classroom, such as writing information pamphlets for the community, analyzing and reporting data from studies and surveys, and writing books for the local day care center.
- Have those who receive services come to the school, such as ambulatory retirement center residents, day care center children, or students from a school within walking distance.

Funding

Actually, service learning is extremely cost-effective. Revenue may be needed for professional development for the staff, transportation of students if they are serving off-site, or procurement of some materials and equipment, depending on the service project. Some possible opportunities to obtain funding are:

- Pursue state and federal grants such as Learn and Serve America, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Council on Aging, environmental studies, beautification programs, and others that may point specifically to a project on which your students are working.
- Establish partnerships with businesses and community-based organizations. Besides providing possible funds or sites for service, they may be able to provide adults for training students or volunteers to help supervise students.
- Apply to philanthropic foundations for grants. Visit your local library and ask them for a guide to local, state, and national philanthropic foundations.
- Seek in-kind donations from the community in the form of free printing, donated materials such as plants for a beautification project, use of equipment, rewards to give to students in recognition of their service, and time volunteering to help train or supervise the students.
- Request financial support from your parent-teacher organization or booster club.
- Appeal to local service clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists, Lions Club, Sertoma, and other community organizations. Many sponsor youth service clubs (e.g., Rotary Interact and Kiwanis Key Club) and may be willing to give some support to classroom efforts as well.

- Hold fundraising events such as car washes, powder puff football games, greased pig contests, or other fun, yet profitable events. Design and sell T-shirts or use the money made from a recycling project.
- Sell a product of your service project such as a book based on the oral histories obtained during visits to the local senior citizens center.
- After you can demonstrate some of the benefits of integrating service learning, make a case for incorporating it into the school and school district policy, designating a line item in the budget.

Keep in mind that if students make the appeal to the businesses, organizations, or the school board, they often get better results than do the adults. Students are also very creative in coming up with other ideas about how funds or items can be procured.

Liability

Liability is always a concern and rightfully so. However, by following risk management procedures, which tend to incorporate preparation with common sense, it can be judiciously managed.

- First and foremost, make sure that what you are doing is service learning, with direct ties to the curriculum.
- The activities in which the students participate must be developmentally appropriate.
- Make sure there is adequate supervision and that the supervisors are familiar with their duties and the expectations of the students.
- Check with the school district regarding the liability coverage.
- Keep parents informed concerning all phases of service learning including curricular objectives that are being met.
- Secure written permission from parents/guardians prior to any activity taking place off-site.

- Spend time anticipating possible problems. Teachers need to discuss the safety issues with the students.
- Develop contingency plans to deal with possible problems, including but not limited to, first-aid treatment and emergency telephone numbers.
- Be certain students have been trained in all necessary skills, including appropriate use of equipment.
- Check any equipment being used to ascertain that it is safe, appropriate, and in good working condition.
- Any off-site setting should be visited in advance to determine safety, appropriateness, and any special needs.
- Screen any adult supervisors and volunteers who will be working with the students.
- Procedures should be established so that everyone knows when and how to report any problems that may occur.

Educational Issues

Professional Development

Providing teachers with professional development is very important. When teachers are expected to try a new strategy, they need to have training and then have time to question and develop understanding. In addition to the initial in-service training, there is an ongoing need to provide this time for support, feedback, and sharing as the teacher develops skills in using the new methods.

There are various means and resources for offering in-service training. It is best to tailor them to the needs and desires of your school.

- Designate a mandatory in-service day for all teachers.
- Offer voluntary in-service sessions.
- Arrange with a local college to offer a graduate or recertification course in service learning, perhaps at your school site. You can attract many teachers to learn about this concept if the course is offered tuition-free!
- Send teachers to local, state, regional, and national conferences where service learning is a topic.
- Provide opportunities for teachers who attend these conferences to share what they have learned with other teachers. This may be a requirement if the school has paid all or part of the teacher's expenses.
- Develop a progam where teachers who are experienced and trained in service learning, whether from your school, district, or outside the district, mentor interested teachers.
- Develop and maintain a resource library where teachers can not only go to get information but also contribute information and resources for sharing.
- Invite guest speakers from local agencies to talk about needs they have and how they could involve the students.

- Use your state department of education by contacting the Learn and Serve America Coordinator. The state coordinator will frequently do training for little or no charge or can give you names of people in your state who are well-versed in service learning who can act as trainers or consultants for your staff.
- Arrange for staff to visit another school site that uses service learning.

Curricular Integrity

Maintaining curricular integrity is a must. While performing service is a nice thing for young people to do and may certainly help develop their social consciousness and their role in society, schools are also responsible for imparting knowledge and developing usable skills.

Service learning can be integrated into the curriculum in one of two ways: a service project as a unifying theme, such as a recycling project; or service as an application of skills, such as lab procedures for testing the pH levels in a river.

Integrating service with learning is much easier for some teachers to do than others. Some suggestions to help this occur:

- Participate as a staff in a thorough review of the curriculum. Discuss the objectives for each grade and each subject area. Teachers need to understand their own curriculum— what they are specifically responsible for teaching and why they teach it—but they also need to understand the overall curriculum as well.
- Have teachers brainstorm how the content of their curriculum is used in the real world.
- Encourage teachers to look for any overlap or interrelatedness between curricular areas.
- Teachers should be encouraged to openly display their learning objectives and be able to explain how each is being reached.
- Provide opportunities to practice making connections between curriculum objectives and service projects.

Student Assessment

You can and should still use standardized and classroom tests to evaluate skill and knowledge development. However, because the students are in an experiential situation in which they are deeply involved, you may also want to consider the following:

- Use rubrics or matrices detailing levels of competence of specific learning objectives. Students should be involved in setting the criteria, making them aware of what needs to be accomplished, to what degree and why, thereby giving them some responsibility for their own learning.
- Students can participate in self- or peer-critiques based on set criteria. After instruction and some practice, students will be fair in their critiques and will strive for improvement in themselves as well as helping others.
- Use portfolios for students to document all elements of the service-learning experience. Selected journal entries from their reflective writings may be included.
- Students can develop an end-of-term project and/or presentation.

Program Evaluation

You want your service-learning efforts to be successful. When evaluating the quality and effectiveness of service learning in your school or district, there are a number of indicators that can be measured.

- The *Standards of Quality for School-Based Service Learning* is published by the Alliance for Service Learning in Education Reform (ASLER). These standards can be used as a self-assessment tool or as a peer assessment by a team from a neighboring school.
- Use the curricular objectives as a checklist to determine which ones have been covered. Students, teachers, and parents could all

be asked to check off those they feel were "taught."

- Analyze standardized test scores. Compare those of students who are involved in service learning and those who are not (using control groups) or compare individual students' previous scores when they were not involved in service learning. However, remember, standardized tests generally only test at the knowledge and comprehension levels of thinking while service learning tends to facilitate the higher levels of thinking.
- To measure the impact on at-risk students, gather and analyze data regarding absenteeism, dropping out, disciplinary referrals, incidence of alcohol and other drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy rates. If service learning does indeed involve the students in more meaningful learning, then these rates should decrease when students become involved in service learning.
- Administer surveys to students, staff, and community members to determine attitudes and perceived impact of the service-learning project. Be sure to share the results of these surveys with the participants.
- Conduct school climate surveys prior to implementing service learning, during, and at the end of the school year.

Support Issues

Building an Infrastructure

Service learning thrives in an environment where staff are supported by administrative actions, students are involved, and the entire community becomes part of the process. It is extremely important to provide this nurturing environment so service learning can succeed.

- Provide a variety of training opportunities so your staff can learn about service learning.
- Service learning works best as a "grass-roots" effort. This is a perfect opportunity to establish a task force that includes students, parents, and community people as well as faculty and staff.
- Schedule concurrent planning periods or set aside days for teachers to facilitate their sharing and planning.
- Be a spokesperson to the rest of the school district and to the community about what the teachers and students are doing.
- Be willing to listen and to look for alternatives as needed to help facilitate the service activities.
- Create a position for a service-learning coordinator for your school, staffed by part of a full-time position, a community volunteer, or an AmeriCorps or VISTA volunteer. A service-learning coordinator can handle much of the more time-consuming logistical arrangements often encountered in service learning.

Public Relations

Service learning is a natural public relations tool. Student service to the school and community shows young people in a positive light, gives the school favorable visibility, and promotes community interest in education. Therefore it is both important and beneficial to keep the public informed about what the students are doing and accomplishing.

- Feature stories in the school newspaper. This will often get other students excited and encourage them to become involved.
- Pursue an agreement with local newspapers to print stories on a regular basis written by their reporters or student reporters.
- Send local television and radio stations notifications of dates, times, and locations of service projects, celebrations, presentations, displays, etc. and request coverage.
- Highlight students' efforts in parent newsletters.
- Schedule presentations by students as well as teachers at school board meetings, P.T.O./P.T.A. meetings, community service club meetings, town/city/county council meetings, and church service organization meetings.
- Schedule displays at the school, the school district office, the public library, a bank lobby, and community festivals.
- Schedule a service-learning fair at the school, a shopping mall, and the public library.
- Send information about service-learning efforts, such as brochures and newspaper articles, to local, state and federal legislators.

Community Support and Involvement

Service learning becomes a bridge between the school and community. If the community is not informed and involved, then service learning will not take place to the extent possible. There are many ways to involve your community.

- Include community representatives on your service-learning task force (which may be an arm of your school improvement council).
- Keep the community informed of the various service-learning projects through newspaper, television, and radio coverage as well as through displays at local libraries, banks, and shopping malls.

- Invite the public to special meetings to explain what service learning is, why you are engaging students in service learning, what current projects are underway, how curricular objectives are being met through service learning, and how the community can become involved. Even if only a small number of people attend, they will tell their neighbors, and you will have the beginning of the ripple effect.
- Have service learning "room parents" who can help with arranging transportation, making contacts and phone calls, aiding with supervision, helping to secure donations (money and materials), putting together a community-based resource book, and many other tasks.
- Use local experts to train students and teachers.
- Work with the great variety of community-based organizations—from the United Way to local soup kitchens, from nursing homes to the American Red Cross.
- Involve your school business partner in your service-learning efforts. They will value the work-related skills developed through service learning.
- Use surveys or questionnaires to determine community needs, assess community sentiments, and evaluate the impact service learning is having on the community. Be sure to share the results with the community.

Conclusion

A final recommendation. Start small, but think big. Find faculty members who are interested in trying new approaches, who are eager to involve their students in activities outside the four walls, and who are perceived as leaders by their peers. Then take one step at a time, be inclusive, and share not only the work, but the joy and enthusiasm generated by service learning.

Next Steps

For further information on service learning, your next step should be to contact the National Service-Learning Cooperative/Clearinghouse. This Cooperative/Clearinghouse was established in 1993 as a resource for educators and community members interested in developing service-learning programs in their classrooms, schools, and communities. With headquarters at the University of Minnesota, the Cooperative/Clearinghouse has a toll-free number, a comprehensive World Wide Web site, and numerous printed and on-line resources. It also provides referrals to appropriate resources, including organizations, model programs, and publications.

- National Service-Learning Cooperative/Clearinghouse
  University of Minnesota
  Vocational & Technical Education Building
  1954 Buford Avenue, R-460
  St. Paul, MN 55108
  1-800-808-SERVE (7378)
  www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

The Corporation for National Service was established by the National Community Service Trust Act. One of its functions is to provide funding support to local schools and communities under its Learn and Serve America program. It also supports a variety of training and technical assistance efforts nationwide. In addition, each state has a Learn and Serve America coordinator, usually situated in the state department of education.

- Corporation for National Service
  Learn and Serve America Program
  1201 New York Avenue, NW
  Washington, DC 20525
  202-606-5000
  www.cns.gov

The *Linking Learning With Life* series is published by the National Dropout Prevention Center which also provides other resources on service learning including additional publications, staff development tools, and learning resources for students. The National Dropout Prevention Center serves as the Southern Regional Technical Assistance Center for the National Service-Learning Cooperative/Clearinghouse.

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